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ABSTRACT

Few schools provide an equitable environment for female and minority students. This paper examined the culture of a high school as it was perceived and experienced by female, at-risk students in grades 9-12. Interviews were conducted with 11 female at-risk students at a high school in the greater New York metropolitan area, their parents, teachers, administrators, and support staff. Data were gathered from school-profile data, focus group interviews, individual interviews, and shadowing. The case study was based on the theoretical framework of Popkewitz, Tabachnick, and Wehlage (1982), which identified school cultures as technical (in which techniques become the ends of school activity rather than the means), illusory (in which activities and purposes seem unrelated), and constructivist (in which collaborative authority and knowledge dominate). Findings show that the culture of the school was illusory and in some instances, technical. The female students identified a few caring faculty members who served as supportive links; however, the at-risk students were not engaged. Racism, sharp boundaries between the school and community (which conflicted with the school's stated objective of community involvement), and faculty expectations of student failure all contributed to the students' sense of alienation. Recommendations are offered for creating a collaborative, caring environment. Four tables are included. (Contains 14 references.) (LMI)

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DEFINING SCHOOL CULTURE USING THE POPKEWITZ MODEL

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DEFINING SCHOOL CULTURE USING THE POPKEWITZ MODEL

INTRODUCTION

Schools are a cultural phenomenon, or, according to Patterson, Purkey & Parker (1986), culturally dependent. As is true of all social institutions, schools have their own culture. In good schools, it appears that the culture permits staff to take an active responsible role for the well-being of the whole school as well as the students. In other schools, however, it appears that staff do not work together to create a caring community, which is the culture of the school.

A number of people have commented on the culture of the schools. Schein's (1985) perspective on culture emanated from the belief that organizational cultures are created by leaders and one of the most decisive functions of leadership may well be the creation, the management, and if and when it may become necessary, the destruction of the culture. The principal is the keeper and changer of the school culture. She or he needs to have the ability, skill, perseverance, and strength to create a school that cares about all of its children. Culture and leadership, when examined closely, are found to be two sides of the same coin, and neither can be understood without the other. Some would go so far as to say that the only thing of importance that educators do is to create and manage culture. Sarason (1982) concurred that educators are managers of the culture; they are managers of the institution. People need to interpret what their experience is and what success is. The manager of the culture has the primary responsibility to manage the interpretation of the experience. Patterson, et al. (1986) discussed the similarities of effective schools and effective principals. The effective principal acts to bring about the characteristics of an effective school. A culture that encourages and facilitates teaching and learning is one of an effective principal's primary goals. The effective

principal knows that school culture can promote attachment to the school as an institution. Both the literature on effective schools and effective principals acknowledge what Deming (in Patterson et al., 1986) called centering the responsibility and control where it is closest to the product. This means giving staff responsibility for the school's organizational health.

Shakeshaft (1986) asserted that equity and education are dependent upon each other. In spite of this, she stated, few schools provide an equitable culture for students and faculty members:

> Women and members of minority groups learn that their concerns, their lives, and their cultures are not the stuff of schooling. They discover that school is not a psychologically or physically safe environment for them and that they are valued neither by the system nor by society. Few schools are equitable, and not surprisingly, few schools are excellent. (p. 500)

The culture of schools is neither nurturing nor educationally challenging for females. Shakeshaft pointed out that two messages emerge from the research on gender and schooling:

> First, what is good for males is not necessarily good for females; second, if a choice must be made, the education establishment will base policy and instruction on that which is good for males. (p. 500)

Unfortunately, according to Shakeshaft (1986), "few schools provide an equitable culture in which all students and faculty members can grow" (p. 500). Change must take place through the culture of the school. Cultural groups are not of one voice. Culture is relational; therefore, you do not change the culture by introducing a tool.

In this study a matrix was used to examine critical incidents in the school to establish whether the school culture was technical, illusory, or constructivist (Popkewitz, Tabachnick, & Wehlage, 1982). Recommendations were made on how to make the school culture more constructivist.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Using a set of case studies of six schools that implemented Individually Guided Education (IGE), Popkewitz, Tabachnick, and Wehlage (1982) showed how IGE was accepted and changed in the six settings. The authors described three major adaptations to IGE. One adaptation was the *technical*, in which techniques become the ends of school activity rather than the means. In the technical school, knowledge came about through a systems approach, in terms of behavioral objectives. Work took the form of worksheets -- planned, sequential activities. Authority was outside the classroom. In the *illusory* school, activities and purposes seemed unrelated. Teachers said kids could not learn because of their backgrounds; knowledge was non-academic. Work took the form of rituals and routines, and there was an illusion of productivity. Authority meant the managers (administrators) told the teachers what to do, who in turn told the students what to do. The *constructivist* adaptation focused on assumptions and definitions in which problem-solving and integration were cornerstones of teachers' concepts of knowledge. Knowledge in the constructivist school was problematic and aesthetic; there was an integration of knowledge skills, and an emphasis on how knowledge was created; and students were seen as the bearers and builders of knowledge. Work was enjoyable activities, creation of knowledge, and was the same for adults as for children. Authority was collaborative, a whole way of life. In the constructivist school parents are needed as active participants. The role of the teacher is to recognize the professional competence and expertise of parents and use them in the classroom as participants. In the constructivist school, authority is defined by knowledge and experience. Whoever has the knowledge is in charge of the class; the teacher structures the class so that parents have the opportunity to share their

knowledge. Popkewitz et al. (1982) discovered that kids learn more than what they are tested on--they learn culture. To practice IGE means (a) incorporating and enculturating; (b) students learn a culture and answer three questions of what does it mean to know, to work, and what is authority; (c) students grow up to assimilate what knowledge, work, and authority are all about. Adults facilitate this knowledge by recognizing heroes and heroines.

METHODOLOGY

Field research was conducted using qualitative research techniques. The student population identified was female, at-risk adolescents in grades 9-12. The students at these grade levels had spent approximately nine years in a school setting. The age level and verbal ability of the students allowed us to gather data through the interview process. In this ethnographic study small group sessions, attitude mapping, shadowing, the collecting of anecdotal material, a review of student records, one on one conversations, individual interviews and focus groups were conducted (Tables 1 & 2). For three months the researchers spent one to two full days per week at a high school in the greater New York metropolitan area. This provided an opportunity to become trusted, observed by the students and staff, and ultimately to become unnoticed. Freedom to walk the halls enabled the researchers to observe the culture of the student and teacher cafeterias, the ebb and flow of traffic in the front office, the guidance suite, and health center, as well as develop a sense of the various feeling ones of the classrooms.

Interactions in the hallways allowed us to compare what people did in relation to what they said. The circumstances of interviews ranged from planned, appointed times to informal sessions. The amount of time spent at the high school allowed us to explore any

TABLE 1
Research Participants, Number of Participants, Areas of Participation

	Number	Focus Group	Individual Interviews	Portrait of Self	Who I Am	Mentor/ Mentee Training	Aptitude Mapping
Students	11	11	11	11	11	11	11
Parents	7		7				7
Teachers	3	3	3	3		3	3
Guidance Counselors	5	5	5	1		1	1
Security Guards	2	2	2	2		2	2
Historian	1		1				1
Nurse	1	1	1			1	1
Secretary	1	1	1	1		1	1
Social Worker	1		1			1	1
Administrator	2	1	2	1		1	1

TABLE 2

Student Demographic Variables

Students	Family Structure	Income	Age Structure	Ethnic Make-up	Adolescent Stress	Children with Handicapping Conditions	Grade Level/Academic Credits Earned
A							
B							
C							
D							
E							
F							
G							
H							
I							
J							
K							

staff and parents. Owen (1991) characterized the design procedure in naturalistic investigations as "providing an emergent plan for a highly interactive process of gathering data from which analysis will be developed" (p. 297).

The sample population of school personnel was chosen from two sources: (1) staff who, by the nature of their role, would normally interact with the at-risk-students on a daily basis, and (2) those who were named by various people to possess information and/or have roots in the community, such as the "town historian," that would provide increased validity to the research project. Simon (1969) made the point that in developing a sample, the ultimate resource is one's ingenuity and creativity faculty, building on experience.

Data Analysis Procedures

In a qualitative research study data collection and analysis go on simultaneously. Krueger (1988) stated that "the beginning principle of analysis is that the problem drives the analysis" (P. 107).

In this study categories and subcategories were created. A definition of identified themes is illustrated in Table 3. Bogdan and Taylor (1975) suggested the identification of themes that run through all or most of the data, or one theme that carries a particularly emotional or factual impact. Spradley (1979) also noted: "Theme analysis involves a search for the relationships among domains and how they are linked to the culture as a whole" (p. 94).

The data were analyzed through theme and discrepancy analysis in order to explore the similarities and differences of students, parents, and staff. Eleven female at-risk high school students, their parents, teachers, administrators, and support staff were interviewed. The intended outcome was an analysis that would guide school officials and staff in building and sustaining a culture of caring for all students.

TABLE 3

Dictionary

The following list of descriptors was used to interpret interviewees' perceptions as indicated by the contextual frame of the response.

Theme	Positive	Negative
Affirmation of the Student	Listening, making time, positive attitude toward student, attention	Throw in face, not listening, yelling, screaming, discounting, ignoring, lack of affect toward student, talking about student, anger, embarrassing, lack of respect, condescending
Instructional Assistance	Conferencing, assistance with work, after/before school help, organizational help, fun, relaxing atmosphere, makes you feel comfortable	Announcing failures, suspension/detention, put-downs, not showing up at appointed time to help student, not accessible
Equality	Fair rules, strict, student part of decision-making process, individual attention for all students	Playing favorites, suspension/detention, racial problems, segregation, put-downs
Flexibility	Extra time to make up work, alternative program, alternative college information, schedule changes, financial aid/scholarship information	No time between classes for help, rigid class routines and rules
Surrogate Parent	Understanding, assistance with homework, safe haven, teen parenting program information	Bad attitude, provoking fighting, anger
Peer Relationship	Understanding, good advice, play sports, age-appropriate behavior, role model	Leading astray, getting arrested, going to prison

The design of the study emanated from qualitative research. The methodology stressed was field research. These techniques were augmented by individual interviews, shadowing, a review of available written data, and anecdotal material. The reliability was probed by a number of controls. The following techniques were used in the data collection process:

1. School profile data which included a demographic and historical review of the general organization patterns of the school system in relation to the various programs affecting the at-risk population researched in this study. The data were collected from archival and interview sources.
2. Focus group interviews: These were held with the eleven identified at-risk females at the high school in grades 9-12. Focus group interviews were also conducted with the support staff, including mentors, and with the parents of the identified at-risk students.
3. Individual interviews: These were held with at-risk students, teachers, guidance counselors, the principal, one of the assistant principals, a secretary, a community aide, a security guard, the district school nurse, a social worker, and parents of the at-risk students. These interviews served to clarify, allow for more intimate observations, and assess the field validity of the findings.
4. Shadowing: A technique where the researcher attempts to experience the life of the other person as the person goes through his/her daily schedule. This was done to develop a feeling sense of the at-risk students and the culture of the school, and also to assess the validity of the findings. The process followed by the researcher included following the respondents during the school day.

Both theme and discrepancy analysis were implemented to analyze the data. In gathering information on the concept of perceived impediments, the researcher also employed triangulation as an additional qualitative method. In this study, triangulation consisted of analyzing a set of responses or themes that emerged throughout the focus groups, interviews, individual interviews, observations, small group meetings, and document review. Second party reading and analysis by colleagues performing similar work in another setting were also incorporated to provide additional insight and reduce bias while increasing content validity and reliability.

FINDINGS

Observation, participation, and remaining a skeptic were our tasks when examining incidents that occurred in the course of a day at the high school. Every attempt was made to look at the experiences and anecdotes of the participants to establish which meaning, what symbols, what metaphors predominated. In Table 4 anecdotes, observations, and incidents are reported as data. In an attempt to understand the culture of the school within its community, the relationships between selected incidents and the culture of the school are depicted according to the Popkewitz et al. (1981) model.

Culture is best understood in relational terms, and there are issues that are contested between the cultures. There is a predominant culture that is at odds with the competing cultures. Since cultures are not neutral, there is a conflict. Racism is a strong negative force that students report leaves them feeling both a lack of membership in the school and a sense that they are their own little families that must stay together and take care of each other. While each student named one or two people to be caring adults, there was no strong consensus of

TABLE 4

Relationship between Selected Incidents and School Culture -- Popkewitz Model

Incidents	Significance	Culture	Criteria
Bathroom doors removed	Eliminate smoking/drug taking/sales	Technical	Train students to develop an approach to no smoking and drug elimination in school, teach quality circle, class constitution. Create leadership council of students, teachers, parents, principal.
School immaculate, cleaning people, guards visible everywhere	Black cleaning people and guards keep "minority kids under control"	Technical/ illusory	Eliminate guards, replace with more teachers, smaller classes, train teachers in authentic learning, bring in role models from all cultures. Develop more equitable distribution of authority.
Nine period day/walls absent of student work	Teaching curriculum, not kids, splintered, if not sports oriented, not successful	Technical	Authentic learning, authentic assessment, display of students' "work in progress." Train staff for curriculum designed to break down stereotypes. Bring out parental involvement in classroom. Apprenticeship learning, academy model.
Family meeting at Martin Luther King Center	Staff on one side of room, parents on other, only females from mentor group attended. No provisions for parents to come to school, school always goes to them.	Illusory	Develop ability to bring out parental involvement in the school and in classroom instruction, need for meaningful communication, expand teacher awareness of the community, train staff in family life curriculum designed to break down stereotypes.
Weekend retreat scheduled for at-risk kids	No chaperones, canceled by memo	Illusory	Principal must follow through, attend weekend retreat, need for meaningful communication, weekend with student.

TABLE 4 (continued)

Incidents	Significance	Culture	Criteria
Principal attends ski trips	Middle income sport; if you can afford the lift ticket, you go away for weekend.	Illusory	Do something that incorporates and is valued by all students, change nature of interpersonal relationships, include community members, business alliances.
Mentor meeting with guest speaker	Minority students and guard on one side of room, white mentors, principal on other side of room.	Illusory	Need for more than a "tool;" need for meaningful communication, expand teacher awareness, team building for mentor, mentee.
Minority students at *Raisin in the Sun* play	Counselor says to teachers in staff room, "School's different when they aren't here." Teacher says to AP, "Why didn't you go with them?" She replies, "Why, because I'm Black?"	Illusory	Need for breakdown of stereotypes, multi cultural, training for all, develop mutual regard, respect.
Halls empty, game room for kids	Minority kids in game room 2 and 3 periods in a row shooting pool, kids hiding in phone booths, outside behind buildings, game room, and cafeteria = different ethnic groups occupy different areas.	Illusory	Multicultural diversity training for teachers, community, parents. Need for authentic learning.

who was caring. No differences emerged among the represented ethnic groups regarding their perceptions of caring.

According to Stone (1988), metaphors are important devices for strategic representations of policy analysis. In all policy discourse, names and labels are used to create associations that lend legitimacy and attract support for a course of action. The statement frequently made regarding at-risk students was in terms of "getting out," or "getting them through." Educating the students to function in the world, to have an occupation, to know how to make choices and decisions did not seem to be part of the vocabulary of this high school. There was a connotation of prison, boot camp, and the capacity to endure. There was none of Glasser's (1990) sense of fun or belonging.

A subtle link in the culture of the school, that at times proved to be negative, was the students' relationship with the security guards. Many of these guards came from experiences similar to the students, and when the identification was strong, it proved to be a difficult task for these adults to maintain a healthy perspective, be objective, and effective with the students. When walking around the school, one saw minority at-risk students, female and male, spending the first two to three periods a day in the game room playing pool, and then following the guards around. When reviewing the students' schedules, one saw two and three periods of gym, or several study halls in place of courses that were dropped. It was all very friendly and amiable. Students walked with their arm on the guard's shoulder; students were hanging out in the phone booth, under the stairwells, behind buildings. While guards patrol the halls, the two fence openings around the perimeter of the school remained unattended, and so students left the premises and returned without hindrance. On the other hand, being in the building was a safer alternative than staying at home or hanging out on the street.

The caring adults who were supportive links, such as certain teachers and role models in the community, served as surrogate parents or mentors, and, at times, provided safe havens for the at-risk students. Destructive links were described by the students in terms of adults showing a lack of maturity, creating fear in the student, and emotional as well as physical absenteeism. Families, for the most part, were seen as a weak link. This may be due, in part, to language barriers. Racism was a strong negative force that students reported left them feeling both a lack of membership in the school and a sense that they were their own little families that must stay together to take care of each other. The alternative education program was becoming increasingly populated with students who self-select into it to help them remain in school and graduate.

CONCLUSIONS

The principal and staff left the discussion of helping at-risk students as an intellectual and humanist argument. They have not connected the definition of cultural emancipation to life in the neighborhood. Sharp boundaries were drawn between school and community, yet lip service was given to being involved.

At this high school staff have convinced themselves that the at-risk students cannot do the work. Failure of students was attributed by staff and administration to the nature of the students: we cannot succeed because you sent us kids who cannot do the work. As a result, the at-risk students were not engaged. The culture of the school was illusory, and in some instances, technical (Popkewitz, et al. 1982). The classes operated in a traditional way: success equaled academics. As a result, the African-American and Latino students in many

cases were not engaged. This created particular problems in class and race. African-American and Latino students were embarrassed when their answers were incorrect, and some were convinced they were incompetent. There were too many students to a class, and money was spent on security guards and aides instead of teachers, technology, and training to reduce class size, improve techniques, and give students a sense of school membership. Staff must take greater initiative and responsibility in serving all students. According to Peterson (1992):

> Teachers face the challenge of creating a place where students feel they belong and where they want to be. In making learning communities with their students, teachers make use of ceremony, ritual, and rite in an effort to create a place where students feel they belong. (p. 15).

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

School cultures reflect belief systems. The leaders of the school system must change the community to change the school. The neighborhood, the school, and the community are the three parts of the equation.

By allowing staff to engage in "if only" thinking (Patterson, Purkey & Parker, 1986), the principal has created a culture of failure. The members of the school cannot appreciate their own heroes or their own successes. The culture of the school will not change by merely introducing a tool. The principal must decide the cultural meaning of what s/he introduces. The principal should engage in both strategic and tactical leadership to enlist support for broader, long-range policies, purposes and plans. His/her job is to build social cooperation and interdependence. Principals must understand that leadership is not only changing people's behavior, it is changing people's beliefs about adult work. Principals must recognize that parents and community members, including the experts, have much to contribute. School is a vehicle for social change and redistribution of resources. Without reinterpretation, the

participants will remain convinced that success is not possible. The principal must work with staff and community to develop engagement between student, teacher and curriculum. S/he must work to change the culture to one that stresses academic and extracurricular success, constancy in values, structure, intergenerational closure, and linkages of adults to kids. S/he must understand that this is a collaborative effort:

* Schools must move away from standardization and central planning to community building.
* Schools need parents as active participants in order to be effective.
* Schools must set up mentoring programs to engage all students.
* Schools need to remove impediments to school membership and academic engagement.
* Schools need to listen to the students regarding their own needs and what will keep them in school.
* Everyone must come to the table on an equal footing.
* Curriculum revisions to study cultural groups previously omitted from history must occur.
* There must be a redefinition of the work students do and how the students work.
* Teachers need to develop a repertoire of teaching strategies to meet the varied learning styles and need of all students.
* All the dollars used for guards, aides, and paraprofessionals should be used to hire better and more creative teachers, and to lower student-teacher ratios.

Using the metaphor of a tapestry, caring is the thread that weaves together the culture and curriculum to create a psychologically safe place where all students can learn, where staff and students can internalize a culture of caring.

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